

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3329

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 2542

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

MANILA FOR USADB

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LA

SUBJ: NEW BOARD AND DIRECTOR GENERAL OF EDL

REF: VIENTIANE 2398

1. A NEW BOARD OF GOVERNORS AND A NEW DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR ELECTRICITE DU LAOS (EDL) WERE SELECTED THIS WEEK. HOWEVER, THE PERSONALITIES INVOLVED ARE NOT SUCH AS TO CREATE CONFIDENCE THAT THE MALAISE THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED EDL SINCE THE OCTOBER 1974 STRIKE WILL BE ENDED OR THAT THE LAO PATRIOTIC FRONT'S EFFORTS TO SLOWLY TAKE COMPLETE CONTROL OF THIS IMPORTANT PUBLIC ENTERPRISE WILL BE RESISTED.

2. THE EIGHT-MEMBER BOARD IS TO BE HEADED BY PHOUANGKEO PHANARETH. PHOUANGKEO, A RELATIVE OF PRINCE BOUN OUM'S AND A DEPUTY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FORM CHAMPASSAK PRO-
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VINCE, IS A COMPLEX CHARACTER. HE IS INTELLIGENT, WEALTHY

AND HAS HELD A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS. AT THE SAME TIME HE IS A NOTORIOUS HOMOSEXUAL AND HIGHLY EMOTIONAL AND COMES FROM A FAMILY WITH CONSIDERABLE ENMENTAL INSTABILITY. A BROTHER IS AT PRESENT IN AN INSANE ASYLUM IN BANGKOK.

3. THE REST OF THE BOARD, WHICH INCLUDES BOUNKEUT KHAMPHAPHONGPHAN, A LEADER OF THE OCTOBER STRIKE, AS ITS EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE, CONTAINS NO ONE LIKELY TO RESIST LPF ACTIVITIES. (COMMENT: EDL'S ACCEPTANCE OF A WORKER'S REPRESENTATIVE ON ITS BOARD OF GOVERNORS FOR THE FIRST TIME CAN BE CONSIDERED ANOTHER SMALL VICTORY FOR THE LPF'S "SALAMI TACTICS".)

4. THE NEW DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF EDL IS MOUTHARA SOUTHAMMAVONG. MOUNTHARA IS YOUNG (BORN 1942) AND IS AN ADOPTED SON OF THE PRIME MINISTER. HE STUDIED IN THE SOVIET UNION, WHERE HE OBTAINED A CERTIFICATE (AS OPPOSED TO A DIPLOMA) AS AN HYDROLOGICAL ENGINEER; HE IS REPUTED TO BE AN INTELLECTUAL LIGHTWEIGHT. HE RETURNED FROM HIS STUDIES IN 1969 AND JOINED THE MINISTRY OF PLAN WHERE HE WAS INVOLVED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NAM NGUM DAM. FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS HE HAS BEEN WITH EDL, MOST RECENTLY AS DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF ITS TRAINING SCHOOL. LITTLE IS KNOWN OF MOUNTHARA'S POLITICAL ORIENTATION, BUT HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE TRAINING SCHOOL WHICH HAS BEEN A CENTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE LPF'S EFFORTS TO TAKE CONTROL OF EDL IS NOT REASSURING. HIS APPOINTMENT HAS BEEN GREETED WITH DISMAY BY DIRECTORS AND SERVICE CHIEFS AT EDL.

5. IT APPEARS LIKELY, THEREFORE, THAT THE CONDITIONS DESCRIBED IN REFTEL WILL CONTINUE TO PREVAIL AT EDL, THOUGH THE PGNU HAS RESPONDED BELATEDLY TO THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK'S URGING (PARA 7 REFTEL) THAT NEW MANAGEMENT FOR THE COMPANY BE APPOINTED.
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